

The Magazine of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO

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COVERAGE
OF THE NEW
ORLEANS TAXI
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Through AFSCME, New Orleans Taxi Drivers Moving City Forward

BY PABLO ROS

Cab drivers in New Orleans are often referred to as the city's "ambassadors" since they are a tourist's first point of contact with this historical and cultural center.

But when the city councilmembers last year fired a barrage of new regulations at cab drivers, they were oblivious to the unnecessary financial burden they were imposing on these small business owners and contractors. In the spirit of supposedly improving the city's image in time for the 2013 Super Bowl, they forced drivers to make unforeseen investments of tens of thousands of dollars, and drove some out of business.

The misplaced emphasis on tourists as primary consumers could backfire when local residents are forced to pay higher fares.

Most of the 1,600 taxi drivers in the city of New Orleans agree: The new regulations imposed by the councilmembers and Mayor Mitch Landrieu make little sense. That's why the drivers, through AFSCME, are organizing their ranks. They're fighting back with union strength and solidarity.

'Never Been a Harder Time'

Exel Joyner and his friend Elbert Hart, who drove cabs for a combined 82 years,



Niran Gunasekera, a New Orleans cab driver, speaks to his fellow taxi drivers at an AFSCME organizing meeting.

agree on one thing: There's never been a harder time to be a taxi driver in New Orleans than there is today.

The new regulations passed by the city included installing new expensive equipment like a security camera and a credit card machine that were only available for purchase from favored contractors. Also, no vehicle

more than seven years old could be on the road, regardless of whether it was in safe and comfortable working order. In a matter of months, many drivers plunged further into debt to meet the new requirements.

In addition, the city decided that a cab owner's permit would now be considered a "privilege."

instead of property. That means it can be revoked or its sale or transfer blocked. Many drivers paid tens of thousands of dollars for a permit and use it as collateral in seeking loans. They also count on selling it for their only form of retirement security.

"Don't just make up rules each day and each night as you go," Joyner says.

All drivers must also submit their vehicles for inspection twice a year. But service at the inspection station is so poor that many drivers say they must arrive in the middle of the night, hours before the station opens, to get in line.

Through AFSCME, New Orleans taxi drivers will seek recognition from the city and a place at the bargaining table.

EDITOR'S NOTE

This special newsletter edition of **AFSCME WORKS** coincides with our new electronic version of the magazine coming to you monthly via email. Be sure to update your email address with us at my.AFSCME.org. With the electronic **WORKS**, we'll keep you in the know about all the news, resources and discounts you need each month.



PHOTO: PABLO ROS

Detroit Crisis Needs Real Solutions

In July, Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder authorized Detroit's Emergency Financial Manager Kevyn Orr to file for Chapter 9 bankruptcy, an act that a state judge later deemed in violation of the state's constitution. The case is now in federal bankruptcy court.

The city's crisis is real, but Snyder and Orr are targeting city workers' pensions — which average less than \$19,000 a year and account for only 4 percent of the city's financial obligations — rather than address the actual cause of the problem: decades of outsourcing and tax base erosion.

AFSCME called upon President Obama and Congress to commit federal assistance for Detroit, and to demand the state of Michigan match that funding. (Since 2002, Detroit's share of state revenues was slashed by \$160 million.) We called upon the White House to convene an Urban Crisis Task Force to execute workable solutions to the economic problems of Detroit and other severely struggling American cities.

A Detroit bankruptcy sets a dangerous precedent. Those who profit from the collapse of public infrastructure see in these struggling cities an opportunity that comes entirely at the expense of the American worker. Their toxic vision for profit above all else shouldn't shove aside one of America's bedrock values: that all American workers deserve to be treated fairly and with dignity.

ORGANIZING

Vermont home care providers building union with AFSCME

Ballots heading to homes in early September.

BY CLYDE WEISS



AFSCME Vermont Homecare United members head to Montpelier to advocate for their clients and their right to unionize.

After 18 months of grassroots organizing, history is about to be made by Vermont's 7,500 home care providers. On Sept. 9, ballots will be mailed for providers to vote on making AFSCME Vermont Homecare United their union.

In July, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), which had contested AFSCME in the organizing campaign, announced that it was withdrawing its name from contention, leaving AFSCME as

the only union on the ballot.

"AFSCME Vermont Homecare United remains focused on the next steps needed to reach the goal of a successful election and a successful first contract," said AFSCME Sec.-Treas. Laura Reyes. "We are inspired by the enthusiasm and support that home care providers have shown in building a union, and we believe this solidarity will strengthen the labor movement here in Vermont."

After months of lobbying by home care providers, lawmakers gave final approval in May to a bill granting them collective bargaining rights. Immediately after Gov. Peter Shumlin signed the bill into law, AFSCME Vermont Homecare United filed for this election with the support of 60 percent of the providers.

"With this momentum, I'm sure we can look forward to better work conditions and better care for our clients," said home care provider Bonnie McDonald of Bennington.

Read more about the campaign at vthomecareunited.org.



AFSCME is 1.6 million members strong. We aid our sisters and brothers every time we can.

It was a small thing, they thought, but something they wanted to do. In July, a week after 19 firefighters died on the job in Arizona, four AFSCME members and a former AFSCME steward of Local 2960, who are dispatchers with the Phoenix Fire Department, collected money and cooked a meal for the Prescott Fire Department. Joseph Witt, Jr., a lead dispatcher with the Phoenix Fire Department and AFSCME steward, tells the story of that meal:

Initially, we wanted to relieve our fellow dispatchers in the Prescott Fire Department

for a day or two because of what they'd gone through and because we knew they could use a rest. But unfortunately we have different qualifications for serving in our different positions, so we had to come up with another idea.

The next best thing was to bring them a home-cooked meal, so we decided to raise funds. With that we were able to cook some sausage and peppers and baked ziti, and we served it to them on Monday, the day before the memorial service.



Phoenix Local 2960 (L to R): Jim Frazier; Chris Radoian; Joseph Witt, Jr.; Justin Lisonbee; and Todd Schlinglof.

The Prescott dispatchers were very appreciative. Being dispatchers, we know how you can easily get forgotten in the middle of it all. But we have a deeper appreciation for what they did and for what they went through. They live in a close community, and it was their brothers out there who died.

As told to Pablo Ros

RESOURCES

Check out some of the great resources available through your union membership

Introducing the AFSCME Advantage Credit Card

Credit Card: a cash-rewards card that earns 1.5 percent cash back on all purchases! This card, issued by CapitalOne® — a U.S.-based bank — is designed to meet the needs of hard-working union members. It has a **low introduction APR for 12 months, competitive rates, and no annual fee**. An alternative card offers a low intro APR for 15 months for those who want to transfer a higher rate balance and save on interest. As an AFSCME Advantage credit cardholder you are also eligible for assistance grants in the event of job loss, disability or hospitalization. For details visit unioncardapply.com.

Program Helps Those Exposed to Sept. 11 Attacks



If you worked in the disaster area; were exposed to the dust and smoke; or lived or went to school nearby, you may be eligible to benefit from the WTC Health Program. Visit AFSCME DC 37's site: dc37.net/about/OSHA/wtchp.html.

AFSCME encourages its members affected by the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks to seek health assistance if needed. The program's WTC Environmental Health Center covers various mental and physical conditions, caused by exposure to the disaster area.

AFSCME Retirees Form Human Chains to Protest Devastating Cuts

BY KAREN GILGOFF

Across the country in July, AFSCME Retirees and our allies rallied against a congressional proposal to cut Social Security cost of living adjustments (COLAs). Retirees formed human chains, at events sponsored by the labor-backed Alliance for Retired Americans, protesting a new method of determining annual inflation, known as "chained CPI."

If enacted, the new formula would mean retirees lose more than \$8,000 in benefits by age 80. To protest, retirees, workers and disability activists linked arms and encircled government buildings to form "human chains against the chained CPI."

According to AFSCME Retiree Barbara Franklin, president of the Illinois Alliance for Retired Americans, seniors have an average income of only \$22,000 a year and need full COLAs for basic necessities.

"We're outraged that our lawmakers would even consider this," said North Carolina ARA Pres. Jim Moore, another AFSCME Retiree leader. Moore's members helped convince his state's Sen. Kay Hagan to co-sponsor a bill rejecting the diminished COLAs.



PHOTO: KIERAN MCCARNEY/ALLIANCE FOR RETIRED AMERICANS

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ONLINE AT AFSCME.ORG

AFSCME.TV: Revenge of the Nerds



With pocket-
protectors and
suspenders,

hundreds of Next Wavers (AFSCME members ages 35 and younger), in July, flooded the Detroit office of the unelected emergency manager – to protest Gov. Rick Snyder's attack on workers. Snyder calls himself a tough nerd, and the Next Wavers demanded an end to his assault on working families. Visit AFSCME.tv



(L to R): Bonnie Diaz (New York CSEA Local 1000), Denis Garcia (California Local 3299) and Xavier Fernandez (New York DC 37).

WORKS at Work

Your WORKS is all about you! Show us where you read your magazine — at your local's canned food drive or on a break from your bus route. It's your chance to take us along. Send your photo to AFSCME.org/works-at-work, and see if you spot any of your union sisters and brothers in the photos on the site.



Omayra Alequin, eligibility specialist,
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance
Program, New York DC 37.

Get the latest news, including updates about what's happening in your state, at AFSCME.org/blog